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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 TASHKENT 001591

SIPDIS

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AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK
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SUBJECT: SCA DAS Krol's Meetings with Uzbek FM Norov and NSC Sec Atayev

CLASSIFIED BY: Nicholas Berliner, Pol-Econ Chief; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) Summary: In separate meetings with SCA Deputy Assistant Secretary George Krol in Tashkent on November 19, Uzbek Foreign Minister Vladimir Norov and National Security Council Secretary Murat Atayev expressed satisfaction with improving U.S.-Uzbek bilateral relations and the Annual Bilateral Consultation (ABC) process. Norov accepted an invitation to lead an Uzbek delegation to Washington on December 17 to launch the ABC process. Both sides emphasized the need to move "from words to actions" on the basis of mutual interests and mutual respect. Norov and Atayev also discussed their visions for Uzbekistan's chairmanship of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), solving Afghanistan's woes through the "six plus three" dialogue and a lingering suspicion of Russian intentions in the region. Both lobbied for increased U.S. investment in Uzbekistan and blamed Tajikistan for mismanaging and stealing electricity which had adversely affected southern Uzbekistan and parts of Kazakhstan. Atayev specifically cited a need to improve information sharing on the important common issue of Afghanistan. End Summary.

Bilateral Relations

12. (C) In introductory remarks, Norov stated that Uzbekistan was ready to move forward from past misunderstandings and stated that neither the U.S. nor Uzbekistan had benefited from the decline in relations (following the Andijon events of 2005). Atayev also commented on the positive dynamic of bilateral relations and said that Uzbekistan was ready to move forward on all issues. Both reiterated the importance of the visits of Under Secretary Burns and Assistant Secretary Blake to Tashkent and hoped that the ABC process would lead to a qualitative improvement in the bilateral relationship. Norov emphasized that all discussions must take into account the mutual interests of both sides based on each country's respective national legislation. He also cited President Obama's Cairo speech, noting that Uzbekistan welcomed the statement that the U.S. would not attempt to impose its values on other countries. He accepted DAS Krol's invitation to begin the ABC talks in Washington on December 17-18 based on the agreed agenda.

13. (C) The Foreign Minister noted four priority areas outlined by Uzbek President Karimov to A/S Blake: 1) additional U.S. investment in Uzbekistan; 2) the liberalization and democratization of Uzbek society; 3) increased contacts between citizens of the two countries; and 4) (apparently referring to Karimov's request to buy U.S. military equipment) that the U.S. should "guarantee" Uzbekistan's security and stability. On this latter issue, DAS Krol explained that this issue was still being examined in Washington and would be a subject for further discussion in Washington during the December ABC talks.

Afghanistan

14. (S) DAS Krol thanked Norov for Uzbekistan's assistance in supporting coalition troops in Afghanistan via the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) and for recently cutting approval times from 30 to 20 days. Norov and Atayev both emphasized that Uzbekistan was following the U.S. policy debate on Afghanistan closely and reiterated the view that there was no military solution to the Afghan problem. The Foreign Minister again used this opportunity to push Uzbekistan's proposed "6 plus 3" framework. Norov recommended that the U.S. focus on the social and economic development of Afghanistan to win the hearts and minds of the people, and cited a recent Chinese investment of \$3 billion in an Afghan copper mine as an example of a useful project. Atayev highlighted the excellent cooperation that the U.S. and Uzbek

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intelligence services enjoyed in the past and expressed a strong readiness to increase information sharing, particularly on Afghanistan. He also explained that groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Al-Qaida were gaining influence in northern Afghanistan, and that the Uzbek government was concerned about the safety of its workers who would be constructing the new Asian Development Bank-funded railway from Hairaton to Mazar-i Sharif.

Investment

15. (C) Norov highlighted economic cooperation as an important aspect of bilateral relations and cited the Navoi free trade zone as a project with the potential to improve economic cooperation. He explained that while South Korea and China were investing large amounts of money in Uzbekistan, he preferred to see more U.S. activity. Regarding economic relations with other countries, Uzbekistan would also like to widen its overseas markets and cited recent agreements with Qatar, Bahrain and Oman as examples. Uzbekistan hoped that the new Hairaton-Mazar-i Sharif railroad would be the first step to ultimately expanding Uzbek markets to Pakistan, India and Persian Gulf ports. Norov also cited the near term opening of the Turkmenistan-China gas pipeline (through Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan) as a good first step to widening Uzbekistan's access to foreign markets. Ambassador Norland used this opportunity to raise the issue of General Motor's recent loan problems, noting that the GM's fortunes would be a barometer for other U.S. companies considering investment in Uzbekistan.

Russia

16. (C) Norov observed that Russia was becoming nervous about China's growing influence in Central Asia, citing Kazakhstan as a country that was becoming increasingly dependent on China. Regarding Uzbek-Russian relations, he stated that 99 percent of

Russia's investment in Uzbekistan was concentrated in the energy and telecommunications sectors, but expressed satisfaction with the fact that Russia now paid real market prices for gas it had previously imported from Uzbekistan for \$40 per thousand cubic meters and resold at European prices. Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev's comments regarding Russia's "privileged interests" in Central Asia were still viewed as "unacceptable." Norov acknowledged that improving relations with the U.S. would likely come at the expense of Uzbek-Russian relations, but that this was a risk that Uzbekistan was willing to take. Atayev also touched on this issue and explained that while Russian companies such as Gazprom and Lukoil were exploring various projects in Uzbekistan, their overall relevance was marginal when compared to China, South Korea and Malaysia.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

17. (C) DAS Krol sought Uzbek views on its upcoming SCO chairmanship and noted that there could be an opportunity to expand SCO engagement with other partners, such as the United States. Norov explained that Uzbekistan would introduce initiatives that would only pursue the common interests of member states. This included mitigating the threats of extremism, narcotics and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Both Norov and Atayev further highlighted the fact that Uzbekistan was interested in expanding SCO contacts with other international organizations, including the European Union. Neither official opposed introducing more formal

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contacts with NATO and possibly Turkey. They added, however, that Russia and China would almost certainly veto any move to allow formal contacts with NATO, and that China opposed Turkish observer status. Uzbekistan continued to refuse to participate in the recent Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) military exercises in Belarus and opposed the CSTO's rapid reaction force which Uzbekistan viewed as a means to maintain Russian pressure and influence in the region.

Relations with Tajikistan

18. (C) Asked by DAS Krol about relations with Tajikistan, Norov stated that relations with Uzbekistan's neighbors had to be based on mutual interests and suggested that Tajikistan was only interested in a one-sided approach. He accused Tajikistan of "unsanctioned" stealing of electricity from the Central Asian power grid and of poor management of Tajik electricity power stations which led to power shortages even in southern Uzbekistan and parts of Kazakhstan. Both Norov and Atayev complained about lack of Tajik responsiveness, and stated that their government had submitted proposals to Tajikistan on water, electricity and border demarcation issues months ago and had not received any replies. On hydropower development in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan in theory was not against the construction of the Rogun dam, but wanted international experts to guarantee that its construction would not harm the interests of downstream countries and was feasible in a seismic zone. Atayev compared relations with Uzbekistan's neighbors to children in a kindergarten, noting that the Central Asian governments were still very young and thus frequent misunderstandings between them were to be expected. On border issues with Tajikistan, Atayev explained that Uzbekistan feared that militants could use the porous and poorly-protected Tajik border with Afghanistan as a staging point for crossing into Uzbekistan. This was why parts of the Uzbek-Tajik border had to remain mined.

Military-Technical Cooperation and Human Rights

¶9. (C) DAS Krol confirmed that the U.S. would be prepared to discuss military-to-military issues during the ABC talks in Washington, but noted that just as the U.S. would seek to respect Uzbek legislation, it was also important that Uzbekistan take into account U.S. legislation (which continues to call for improvements in Uzbekistan's human rights situation). These matters, Krol said, would all be discussed in Washington. Krol noted that Uzbekistan's decision to amnesty opposition figure Sanjar Umarov represented an important step and was well-received in Washington. Responding to a query from DAS Krol about what exactly Uzbekistan envisioned in the way of military cooperation with the U.S., Atayev explained that Uzbekistan's first priority was to improve quality and standards. He specifically cited the need to improve the training available for military personnel, as well as improving the number of aviation specialists and the quality of helicopter technology.

Extremism in Central Asia

¶10. (C) Addressing the issue of religious extremism in Central Asia, Atayev noted a rise in Islamic identity in many parts of Central Asia, particularly in Kazakhstan and Southern Kyrgyzstan (he cited a decline of secular authority in Osh). He said that Uzbekistan views this phenomenon as a threat and had offered to conduct joint seminars with its neighbors. Without mentioning the

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Andijon incident specifically, he said that Uzbekistan in 2005 had put down an effort to establish a caliphate in the Uzbek and Kyrgyz parts of the Fergana Valley.

Central Asian Troops in Afghanistan

¶11. (C) DAS Krol sought Atayev's views on the hypothetical deployment to Afghanistan of troops from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Atayev stated that Uzbekistan would not object to Kazakh or Kyrgyz troops deploying to Afghanistan, although he clearly viewed such a possibility as highly unlikely. He noted somewhat wryly that both countries had officers with "on the ground" experience in Afghanistan from the Soviet period.

Comment

¶12. (C) DAS Krol's meetings with Uzbek officials again highlighted the improving relationship with Uzbekistan and the mutual desire to move from words to action, while also making clear that difficult issues still lie ahead. Agreement on the ABC agenda has opened the way for our regular dialogue with Uzbekistan to move forward. However, as Norov noted in his reference to "learning from the past," there is a hope in the GOU that moving on will mean avoiding the "soft issues" that the Uzbeks find particularly bothersome. We should be under no illusions the GOU will change its outlook anytime soon. The ABCs are going to be a slow process, but if we are patient and relatively modest in our expectations, they could lead to positive outcomes down the road.

¶13. (U) DAS Krol did not have an opportunity to clear this cable.
NORLAND